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AGENDA COVER MEMORANDUM

AGENDA DATE: December 4, 2007

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Lane County Administration, Office of Public Information

PRESENTED BY: Amber Fossen, Public Information Officer
Anthony S. Bieda, County Administration

AGENDA TITLE: Report Back – Telephone Poll and Focus Groups; Listening Tour

DISCUSSION: The Board will review the results of attitude research activities that augment the community outreach events known as the "Listening Tour."

BACKGROUND:

The Lane County Board of Commissioners is engaged in a multi-month community outreach effort to assess and improve the community's attitudes toward Lane County government. The effort began in July with a countywide Listening Tour, which elicited hundreds of responses from five discrete meetings around the county, and from respondents at the Lane County Fair in August.

The Listening Tour provided indication of what's on the community's mind in relation to Lane County government. Comments were varied but related to several topic areas, including:

- Priorities for the application of resources and approaches to prioritizing
- Ideas and feelings about new taxes and new revenue sources
- Questions and opinions regarding timber revenue and Secure Rural Schools funding
- Recommendations and thoughts regarding accountability and communication between Lane County and community members
- Specific thoughts on services, notably public safety, prevention and other human services, and veteran's services
- Employee and Commissioner compensation and benefits

Results from the Listening Tour were conveyed to consultants who incorporated the community's feedback in subsequent phases of outreach.

Today's report back reflects another milestone in the process – the completion of phase two or community focus groups and community polling via telephone interviews.

RESULTS OF COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH:

Two groups of randomly selected adult residents were asked to focus on general awareness and understanding of Lane County services. A total of 34 community members participated in the focus groups held Nov. 1 in Eugene.

Key findings (see Attachment A):

- People generally understand what services the County provides.
- Participants think law enforcement services are important but the current performance of the public safety system is average.
- Public health is an important County function and the County is doing a good job of providing this service with limited means.
- Groups were split on whether or not they felt they received good value for the taxes they pay.
- Regarding raising taxes, cutting service or both, focus group participants suggested requiring user fees, assigning greater accountability and emphasizing efficiency.

RESULTS OF COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS VIA TELEPHONE:

In mid-November, 400 Lane County registered voters were polled to measure the overall rating of County programs and services and the importance and performance rating of those services.

The telephone poll found that public safety programs and services are the top rated in importance followed by public health (**see Attachment B**). It also found that public safety has the greatest gap between its importance rating versus its performance rating. The gap analysis – the difference between the degree to which the community values a program or service, and their perceptions of how well Lane County is providing that program or service – is a key point of reference for measuring changes in community attitudes as the county changes its delivery of programs and services.

The poll focused on General Fund services. In addition, two questions regarding the possible relocation of the Fairgrounds were included. Respondents were somewhat aware of the proposal to move the Fairgrounds and close to neutral on whether or not they would support a move (41 percent support; 47 percent oppose).

CONCLUSIONS:

The amount of community input from the Listening Tour was significant and, at the Board's direction, needed closer examination, prompting phase two of the outreach effort.

Results of the community focus groups and poll show that people are aware of Lane County Government and the services it provides. It also shows us that public safety and public health programs and services are valuable to the community. However, there is a gap between ratings of importance and evaluation of performance that may be the basis for future community attitude assessment.

These results provide an opportunity to focus the institution's attention on narrowing the gap between services that are important and services that are provided effectively and efficiently. At least part of the remedy may involve more effectively communicating the quality and effectiveness of the programs and services Lane County provides with little fanfare and recognition on a daily basis.

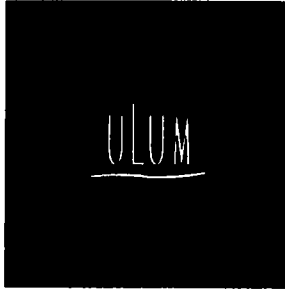
NEXT STEPS:

The Board has emphasized the need for community involvement as it prepares to reexamine the organization's goals, priorities and strategic objectives. In continuation of this outreach effort, the Board indicated it would like to include the following steps as part of its outreach effort:

- Online survey, to be conducted through the Lane County website
- Employee focus groups, conducted in-house during the work day
- Structured input from Advisory Committees and organizations

ACTION:

Report back – no action is requested.



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Lane County Focus Groups
FINAL REPORT

Prepared By: Beverly Mayhew
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Nov. 8, 2007

Introduction

The Ulum Group was asked to conduct two focus groups of randomly selected adult residents of Lane County to focus on a general awareness and understanding of the various services Lane County provides, with particular emphasis on law enforcement and public safety services.

The results of the qualitative research of the focus groups will provide a thematic blueprint from which perceptions of the county services can be further tested, for example, quantitatively within a broader population of county residents and/or within a group of county employees.

Focus Groups

Two groups of residents participated in the focus groups held on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2007. Participants were recruited by Lockwood and Associates, a local marketing research firm, using a database of approximately 194,000 Lane County voters. Lockwood was advised to balance the groups by age and gender, and to the greatest extent possible within a short timeframe, geographic diversity within the county. Eighteen people were recruited for the first group held over the noon hour (16 people attended); all 18 people recruited for the evening group showed up and participated. The total number of participants in both groups was 34. The screening questionnaire used to recruit participants is attached to this report.

The first focus group was comprised of 10 women and six men from the following communities: Eugene (3), Springfield (4), Cheshire (1), Veneta (1), Cottage Grove (2), Junction City (1), Vida (1), Oakridge (1), Dexter (1) and Creswell (1). The second group was equally divided in terms of gender, with nine men and nine women, from the following communities: Eugene (9), Elmira (2), Dexter (2), Pleasant Hill (1), Blue River (1), Cottage Grove (1), Junction City (1) and Cheshire (1).

Following is a breakdown of age ranges represented in both groups:

25-34: 3
35-44: 4
45-54: 8
55-64: 10
65+: 9

Each participant received \$50, distributed at the end of the hour, for participating. Refreshments were served.

Focus Group Questionnaire

The focus group questionnaire was drafted by The Ulum Group after consultation with county staff and staff from Lindholm and Associates (the latter to insure compatibility with the planned quantitative survey). The questions aimed to extract awareness of county services in general and specifically as they relate to law enforcement/public safety and public health. Another important element of the questionnaire was to ask people to rate job performance and the relative importance of both law enforcement and public health. Finally, we were interested to learn what participants felt were possible solutions to the county's budget challenges. The verbatim responses to each

question were recorded by hand during the focus group and later transcribed into easy-to-read, session-specific charts.

Both the questionnaire and the individual focus group notes are attached to this report for reference.

Key Findings

Following are the key findings that emerged from the combined groups around the main issues of law enforcement, public health and possible solutions to the budget challenges.

Awareness of Lane County services

With no prompting, participants demonstrated a fairly good understanding of the primary activities and services the county is engaged in. Public health, safety (sheriff/jail), road maintenance, the fairgrounds, animal control, and so on, were top-of-mind responses that received more than one mention.

Key finding: People generally understand what services the county provides.

Law Enforcement/Public Safety

When asked what came to mind when they heard the term “law enforcement” participants most frequently answered response time of officers in the event of a crime or unlawful incident, and although there was some sympathy suggested (“they’re doing the best with what they have”) the general consensus was that response time is slow, and that service is lacking.

The term “public safety” did not elicit significantly different responses.

The average score, with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent, in rating the job that the county does in providing law enforcement services, was 5.4. The average score, using the same scale, of the importance of the county providing law enforcement services was 7.8.

Key finding: Response time appears to be both a definition of county law enforcement services as well as an indicator of performance. Participants think it’s important that the county provide law enforcement services, and that the current job performance of the county in providing those important services is average.

Public Health

Participants were able to identify the primary service offerings in the area of public health — education, prevention, mental health services, disease alert program, immunizations, etc. The need for greater effort/resources directed toward mental health was frequently mentioned. The average score, with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent, in rating the job that the county does in providing public health services, was 6.7. The average score, using the same scale, of the importance of the county providing public health services was 7.9.

Key finding: People have a general awareness of the public health services provided by the county, and feel that the county is doing a good job of providing services with limited means, and that providing public health services is an important county function.

County's Role in Daily Life

The good news is that a majority of the participants would notice if the county closed its doors. This supports the findings in the first question that people are aware of the services that the county provides. The county is recognized for providing basic services to the poor, who might otherwise be unserved, keeping the roads maintained and so on. The comment, "At least they are doing the job, even if it's lousy," is supported by the previously described ranking of law enforcement and public health job performance vis-à-vis importance.

Key finding: The county's work is noticed.

Value of County Services

The groups were split in their response to this question. The group at noon generally thought they received good value while the evening group was fairly negative about the perceived value they receive for the taxes they pay. More surveying to explore this issue will be necessary to draw a conclusion one way or the other.

Raise Taxes? Cut Services? Both?

There was a fair amount of discussion about taxes and fees; not necessarily cutting taxes but rather making them fair by charging on a use basis, or progressive basis based on income. There was even some support for a countywide sales tax. Some discussion about inefficiency, high salaries and benefits took place during both groups.

Key finding: Require fees for service use; that is, user fees. Assign greater accountability and emphasize efficiency.

Conclusion

While responses from just 34 people do not provide enough support for changing policy, the effort is definitely worthwhile as it provides a snapshot, a glimpse into the minds of random constituents. From this snapshot, a more developed picture can be formed from a quantitative survey, such as the one planned, that can test the qualitative responses received here.

We were pleasantly surprised (and pleased) to learn that the respondents generally understand what the county does. Although there was one shot fired at the "Working for You" ad campaign, it's fair to give that campaign at least some credit for the awareness. Regardless of its source, however, the generally positive awareness provides a solid jumping-off point for further education and image building. In addition, people feel that the work the county does in the areas of law enforcement and

public health is quite important. Job performance is lacking according to the respondents, but again, people know what the county does and believe it to be important — a strong starting point for improvement efforts.

We look forward to the results of the follow-up qualitative survey to see if the 34 participants were representative of a larger county voice or mere aberrations; we speculate (and hope!) that it is the former.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist the county in its effort to listen to and learn from its constituents. Regardless of the outcome, there's benefit in the action itself.

LANE COUNTY "LISTENING TOUR" SURVEY
NOVEMBER 2007
LINDHOLM RESEARCH
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was part of the Lane County “Listening Tour” strategic planning process related to prepare Lane County for the reduction and eventual end of revenue received as part of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

Other research that is part of the larger project includes five listening tour events held between July and September, one in each Commissioner District; and two focus groups of residents in November. Reports on these items will be prepared separately.

This survey provides information intended to assist County Commissioners and staff in setting Lane County budget priorities.

Two questions about the proposed move of the Lane County Fairgrounds were also included.

This survey is composed of 400 telephone interviews of Lane County registered voters conducted Monday, November 12 through Wednesday, November 14, 2007. The margin of error at the overall sample median is 5 percent.

- Though difficult to compare directly, the long term rating of Lane County public safety has increased from the lows during the 2nd half of 2005 and 1st half of 2006. It is not clear if this increase is statistically significant.

The trend was charted across the most comparable ratings (public safety mean performance rating).

This change might not be significant because the underlying populations sampled varied substantially across surveys.

There was no significant increase from the November 2006 survey.

- The survey deliberately included three open ended questions because these correlate more closely to the listening tour and focus group results.

Question 2 responses were very widely distributed and did not coalesce.

Question 3 revealed that the most important categories for respondents were law enforcement and public safety.

Question 6 received a wide range of comments. The 27% of respondents who had “No Opinion” or “No Comment” is relatively low for this type of survey.

- Public safety programs and services are generally the highest rated services in importance.

Generally, mean importance ratings of 8.00 or higher are considered very high.

Top rated services in order of mean importance rating:

a) Prosecution of crimes	8.55
f) Investigation of crime	8.49
g) Youth offender detention and supervision	8.06
b) Jail	8.03
h) Infectious disease prevention and response	8.02

“Don’t Know” responses above a certain level imply that there is lack of public knowledge about the service. There is only one service with a “Don’t Know” percentage greater than 10%, a common standard: 5o Lane County Extension Service. The general knowledge about this program is lacking.

- Non-public safety programs and services are generally the top rated services in performance.

Top-rated services in order of mean performance rating:

o) Lane County Extension Service	6.86
p) Animal adoption and shelter services	6.58
l) WIC: Health and nutrition services	6.56
h) Infectious disease prevention and response	6.55

Note that only one item, “h Infectious disease prevention and response,” makes both the top importance and top performance lists.

There is a relatively high percentage of “Don’t Know,” defined as 20% or greater for nine of the 20 program or service areas. This “Don’t Know” reaches 31% in the case of 5j Services for high-risk infants. There appears to be limited public contact with this program.

- Public safety issues generally have the greatest gap between importance and performance.

Generally, the GAP flags programs and services which are most deficient in the view of the respondent. The GAP is a rough measure, but is commonly used among local governments.

The sizes of the largest GAPs are:

f) Investigation of crime	3.17
a) Prosecution of crimes	2.74
c) Rural patrol	2.70
b) Jail	2.50
g) Youth offender detention and supervision	2.40
s) Help for veterans and their families	2.30
e) Parole and probation	2.25
k) Emergency psychiatric care	2.06

There is no correlation between the overall mean importance ratings and the overall mean performance ratings (across the 22 items rated in Questions 4 and 5). The GAP analysis process implies the higher the positive correlation the better the budget allocation.

- The Fairgrounds issue is somewhat well known. The issue received a mean familiarity of 5.14 on a scale of zero to ten. This is about average.
- There is not yet sufficient support for the fairgrounds move plan.

The percentages supporting and opposing were:

Total Support	41%
Don't Know	12%
Total Oppose	47%

The wording of the ballot question was neutral. However, since it did not include any description of the precise change, it is likely that 41% is a minimum level of support for the proposed move.